Note to correspondents
United Nations Department of Public Information

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UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER GROUP IN CENTRAL AMERICA (ONUCA)

ONUCA was established by the Security Council on 7 November 1989 in response to a series of requests from the five Central American Governments - Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Its original mandate was to verify these countries' compliance with their security undertakings in the Esquipulas II Agreement, namely to cease aid to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements in the region and not to allow their territory to be used for attacks on other States.

On 27 March 1990, the Security Council authorized an enlargement of the mandate of ONUCA and the addition of armed personnel to its strength in order to enable it to play a part in the military aspects of the voluntary demobilization of the Nicaraguan resistance. ONUCA's responsibility included taking delivery of, and destroying, the weapons, materiel and military equipment of the members of the Nicaraguan resistance, both in Honduras and Nicaragua.

On 20 April 1990, the Council authorized a further expansion of the mandate to enable ONUCA to monitor a cease-fire which had come into effect in Nicaragua and the separation of forces expected to result from the withdrawal of Nicaraguan Government troops from certain areas in the country. ONUCA, which originally had been composed only of unarmed military observers, was temporarily enlarged to include a 700-strong battalion from Venezuela, which was deployed in eight "security zones" where the members of the Nicaraguan resistance were to be demobilized.

The demobilization of the Nicaraguan resistance, which had commenced at La Kiatara, Honduras, on 16 April 1990, was essentially completed on 28 June 1990, although individuals and small groups belonging to the resistance continued to present themselves to be demobilized until 6 July. During the entire period more than 22,000 members of the resistance were demobilized in Nicaragua and Honduras and their weapons destroyed. Following the successful completion of the demobilization process, the Venezuelan battalion was withdrawn and ONUCA reverted to its original mandate.

As of October 1990, ONUCA consisted of 254 military observers and 159 military support personnel (naval squadron and air unit). Participating countries were Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, India, Ireland, Spain, Sweden and Venezuela. In addition, ten civilian medical personnel and four pilots were provided by Germany. Also serving with ONUCA were 90 international and 93 locally recruited civilian staff.

ONUCA's current deployment consists of a headquarters at Tegucigalpa, liaison offices at each of the five capitals (San Jose, San Salvador, Guatemala City, Tegucigalpa and Managua), 18 verification centres and three operational patrol posts.

On 26 October 1990, after consultations with the five Central American Governments, the Secretary-General recommended to the Security Council an extension of ONUCA's mandate for a further period of six months, that is, until 7 May 1991. At the same time, in light of developments in the region, he proposed to close some of the verification centres whose tasks had been primarily related to the Nicaraguan conflict. This, he stated, would permit a reduction of approximately 40 per cent in the number of military observers currently assigned to ONUCA, without impairing its ability to carry out its mandate.

On 5 November 1990, the Security Council adopted resolution 675 (1990), extending ONUCA's mandate until 7 May 1991 and agreeing to the Secretary-General's recommendations.

On the basis of this resolution, ONUCA's strength will be reduced to 158 military observers by mid-December and its deployment revised. The liaison offices and verification centres in each of the five capitals will be merged to form in each case an observer group headquarters, which will have a reserve patrolling capacity. The number of verification centres, outside the capitals, will be reduced to eight, with four operational patrol posts attached to them. ONUCA's air wing will also be reduced by six helicopters to a strength of one fixed-wing aircraft and six helicopters. The helicopters will all be obtained by commercial contract, thus permitting repatriation of almost all of the Canadian air unit which has hitherto provided the bulk of ONUCA's helicopter support.

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